

It's the West at its best

Marriage was on – and off – the menu this week, with one aristocratic groom making history and a disgruntled bride-to-be ditching her fiancé at the altar, only to insist on continuing with the wedding reception. The Royal Family, no less, announced that preparations are under way for its first same-sex marriage, which is due to take place in Devon. The Queen's cousin, Lord Ivar Mountbatten, who has three children, came out as gay two years ago. He will marry his partner James Coyle this summer. And in an incredible show of support, Lord Ivar's first wife Penny will give him away on the day. The wedding will take place in a private chapel at Bridwell Manor, Lord Ivar's Grade I listed home near Uffculme, in Mid Devon. The couple are planning a small ceremony, followed by a big party. Lord Ivar and Penny divorced eight years ago, but are still close. When he revealed he was gay Lord Ivar admitted he struggled with his sexuality throughout their 16-year marriage. Lord Ivar knew he was gay from a young age, and told Penny he was bisexual before he proposed. "I had a really happy childhood, but I could never tell my parents I was gay," he said. "Where I grew up, gay men were called poofs, queers, everything derogatory under the sun. In fifteen or twenty years' time people will struggle to understand how we came to be having such conversations. People will look back and say, 'What's the big deal?' But for our generation it was."



With her pennants fluttering in the wind, and crew and supporters crowding the decks, the fishing boat Van Djick steams into a strong position during the closing stages of the annual Brixham trawler race. Picture by Steve McMillan

For his sake, let's just hope Lord Ivar has remembered to pay for the wedding reception or he may end up with the sort of tongue-lashing received by ditched groom Kevin Rogers. His angry bride-to-be, Harriet Butler, dumped him on the very morning of their wedding after learning he hadn't paid for the reception at An Mor Hotel in Bude. Incensed, but undaunted, Harriet said that while the wedding was off, the party was most definitely on – switching venues to their planned honeymoon spot in the North Cornwall resort. Wearing her £900 wedding dress for the gathering, she said: "Because everyone was here I just thought we should make a day of it. I wasn't going to let this be a horrible day so I put on my wedding dress, the bridesmaids put on their outfits, everyone else dressed up, and the photographer came round too." Ignoring persistent calls from Kevin, she sipped gin and tonics, saying afterwards: "Everyone was being really positive for me. But I did stop a couple of times and think that it was all a little bit surreal. It's not just about the money. It was a kick in the face that he didn't talk to me about it."



Quote of the Week: The (Prime Minister's) Brexit dividend tosh treats the public as fools. Sad to see the government slide to populist arguments rather than evidence on such an important issue.

Totnes Conservative MP Sarah Wollaston

HQ. The topping out ceremony at Blackdown House, which will be the authority's new home by January 2019, was completed by Cllr Andrew Moulding Chairman and Cllr Ian Thomas. Paul Gale, divisional director for Interserve southern region, who are the council's contractor for the scheme, said: "We have celebrated by laying a brick and attaching a yew tree branch to the highest point of the building. The yew tree is said to keep evil spirits away. It is an age-old tradition."

Another Westcountry resident keeping up a personal "age-old tradition" this week was 85-year-old Joan Bird. Happily tucking into an ice-cream on Lyme Regis seafront, she cheerfully admitted she had been doing it all her life. And a recent controversy over a new ice-cream seller on the promenade stirred fond memories for Joan, after a photograph of four-year-old girl buying an ice-cream in 1936 was featured in the *Western Morning News*. That little girl was Joan, and after seeing the picture she promptly contacted freelance photographer, Richard Austin.

In an effort to avoid any more of Harriet's wrath, Kevin could do a lot worse than grab himself a sprig of yew – like the good folk of Honiton did this week in a bid to ward off "evil spirits". A yew tree branch has been placed on top of East Devon District Council's proposed new

Joan, who had posed for the shot for her father Percy, offered to recreate the photograph. "Dad was a very keen photographer," she said. "He used to tell me where to stand and took many pictures. I don't remember him taking the ice-cream picture but I remember the ice-cream seller, who was Ted Welsh. The ice-cream all those years ago was as good as it is today. But there were no seagull attacks then because all the gulls were feeding at the municipal rubbish dump." Joan moved to Lyme Regis with her family at about the time the photo was taken. She moved away to work in London when she was 20, but returned a decade later with three children in tow. "I still think of it as home," she said. "And I still love ice-cream."

Finally, there seems to be no let-up in Colyton residents' campaign against an anonymous letter writer whose views have been dubbed "pants". The Devon town continues to be festooned with underwear of all kinds, including knickers, jockeys, socks and pyjamas,

after local people came out in support of a mum who received a critical note about the state of her laundry. Claire Mountjoy received a letter, marked "on behalf of a local business", in which the writer asked her to stop hanging her washing outdoors to dry, while urging her to keep Colyton "a town we can all be proud of". But when she made the letter's contents public, fellow residents and traders came out in support, and are now hanging their laundry outside in support. The letter read: "While we understand you have a small house with no outside room for your boys, would you please consider using a tumble dryer or hanging the washing indoors. This letter is not written with malice but we ask you to please help us all keep Colyton a town we can all be proud of." Claire, an education officer for Devon Wildlife Trust, responded by saying: "Colyton has a tradition of being slightly rebellious and I think that has been shown. There are even pants flying from flagpoles." Edward Jacobs posted on Facebook in support of her, saying: "Love it and I'm proud to say that Colyton is my nearest town... just up the road. Personally I think the anonymous letter was 'pants'."

My day out at a public hanging

My Story: Westcountry artist Anna Grayson shares her experience of being honoured by the Royal Academy

There are some experiences in life that are both terrifying and fantastic at the same time. Being selected to hang my work at the Royal Academy Summer Exhibition is one such experience. The RA is unique in the world and steeped in history and the spirits of the greatest artists to have lived, such as Turner, Constable and the Academy's founder Joshua Reynolds. I was pretty amazed when I was first selected in 2014, but to have two pictures selected for this year's 250th anniversary show has been mind blowing and utterly delightful in equal measure.

This year the exhibition spills out into London's West End with installations of flags made by Royal Academicians hung in the streets, and free access to new galleries created behind Burlington House where the old Museum of Mankind used to be. There is a massive installation in the courtyard and two vast works by David Hockney. This year's RA show is huge, both physically, culturally, and in terms of big-named artists with even bigger works of art.

Yet there is a sense of democracy, broadening out access to art to all rather than restricting it to art buffs and collectors. Grayson Perry's selection and coordination has underlined this with a theme of "Art Made Now" and also by requesting works "that the judges might find amusing". Ah, that is where I come in...

A few years ago I started re-making famous works of art as photographs. I did this at first purely because I fancied some of our great masterpieces on my own walls. I don't like printed reproductions, can't afford the ridiculous prices in the big auction houses, and don't have the bottle to become an art thief. Photography seemed the answer, particularly as this gave the opportunity for updating, for let's face it some old masters do look a little dated. So my version of Botticelli's idealised male vision of a perfect woman's body has become a Barbie doll; My Arnolfini couple are too busy on their mobile phones to communicate with each other; and Vermeer's girl with a pearl earring has one through her nose as well.

One of the pictures I submitted

for the RA was a version of the Mona Lisa, using the Teign Estuary in autumn colours as a substitute for Leonardo's Tuscany. My original model couldn't make the shoot so my husband stood, in wearing a long black wig and my best cashmere top under a satin shawl. The result (pictured) may not be to absolutely everyone's taste, but it is far more up to date in terms of gender neutrality and political correctness, and people seem to fall about laughing at it. My husband is a brilliant model and muse and mercifully very patient and he posed with me for my version of Klimt's Kiss. My version illustrates the existence of enduring love and tenderness, using crocheted patchwork blankets to replicate Klimt's detailed patterns. This kind of selfie is a challenge to shoot with only ten seconds from pressing the shutter to positioning myself on the sofa in a precise pose whilst keeping the blanket on.

I don't like reproductions and don't have the bottle to be an art thief

Both pictures were hung at last year's South West Academy Open and received a good response from the incoming chair, Bob Mountjoy. So, I decided to give them a punt with the RA.

So it was that I found myself in Piccadilly for Varnishing Day – originally the day set aside for artists to apply a coat of varnish to their work as it hung on the walls, but now a celebration for all the artists taking part. The traffic is halted and the artists march from the Royal Academy to St James Church for a service, a belting out of hymns and an intellectually rigorous address about the uneasy relationship in history between religion and art. Then everyone marches back and the heavy doors are flung open to reveal the exhibition for the first time.

In 2014 I made the mistake of looking at the art first, and by the time I found the buffet table it was empty. I was not going to do that a second time, so I dashed past the huge textile sculpture, by Joana Vasconcelas, and turned left into the main gallery where the buffet



WHAT'S YOUR STORY?

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was laid out. But again the food eluded me as I was distracted by the art, hung in a glorious riot of joy and colour on newly painted bright yellow walls. This was the gallery whose hang was directed by Grayson Perry himself, and there on the wall between some large pieces by very famous RA were my two small pictures.

What an accolade! They looked quite happy there, amongst the other pieces that made the judges smile, that represented "Art Made Now". I suppose being modern versions of well-loved art they are indeed of the now, representing how the layers of meaning and interpretation in really good art

can live on and still speak to the here and now. This vibrant energetic gallery has some examples of exquisite skill in art, but art that has moved on from what I would call "contemporary". There is a lot of social commentary and "Art Made Now" does seem to sum it up rather well, and feels better than "post-contemporary" somehow.

Gorgeous though the buttercup yellow is, after three private views it starts to feel a bit like tartrazine. The remedy for me was the set of print rooms in the RA's Sackler wing. This is an oasis of calm and also of truly affordable work by some very big

names in the art world, including Gormley, Perry, Devon's Peter Randall Page, Bristol's ever-rising star Emma Stubbin, and Devon's Pine Feroda. Definitely not to be missed. There is still humour there, and my favourite is by Chris Orr MBE RA (a regular exhibitor at Devon's Brook Gallery). It is part of a series of works called *The Miserable Lives of Fabulous Artists* and depicts all the goings on that Constable missed out of his famous Haywain painting. Again it is a recognisable old master with a twist of "Art Made Now". As well as being affordable treats, sales raise money for the RA art schools which do that rare thing these days of providing free masters courses for the talented – thus securing "art made in the future".

The Royal Academy Summer Exhibition continues until August 19. The exhibition is available to view online (royalacademy.org.uk) and Anna's work will also be on show at the Artizan summer exhibition in Torquay's Fleet Walk from July 6 to August 17.